

# Judges 14

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now even if you are a Republican here this morning, you've got to feel a little bit sorry for the new royal baby, haven't you? We've known about his existence since, well, very soon after his conception.

We've watched his progress through the media as William and Kate have gone on their royal business. We've speculated on whether it was going to be a boy or a girl and on the name. We eagerly waited news from the birth as Kate was in labour earlier this week. And more than that, we know the role this child is going to play in his life.

Third in line to the throne. All of us have taken a step back this week because that baby has been born. You see, we know, don't we, the great responsibility that's his.

He's going to grow up in public. I guess none of us would wish that on anyone. And perhaps one day he will take the crown. Now the character we're looking at in these sermons over the summer when I'm preaching, and it was a little bit like that.

[ 1 : 05 ] A child promised in Judges chapter 13 before he was even conceived. A child with a very important role to play in his life.

A child with a divinely given identity and role. So just look back to Judges chapter 13 verse 5. This is the angel of the Lord's description of Samson.

The angel of the Lord says, Samson's role in his life was to be used as a saviour for God's people. God's people at Israel, they were in the promised land now, but they weren't free. They were serving the Philistines. And with Samson, the Lord grows a saviour from scratch to begin to rescue his people.

And more than that we're told, aren't we, that he was to be a Nazarite. A Nazarite, one of those people who especially set apart to the Lord. He was to live a holy life.

[ 2 : 17 ] And to be a kind of visible sign to everyone else around in Israel of the kind of people that they should be. Totally devoted to the Lord. Taking seriously the Lord's commands in every way.

There was a weight of expectation that brought out on Samson. He was a man of great promise. He was a man of great potential. He was the man of the hour. He was the man that Israel needed. And chapter 13 ends on an exciting note, doesn't it? If you look down at verse 25. The Spirit of the Lord began to stir him. God is at work by his Spirit in Samson.

So we begin chapter 14 with bated breath. What is going to happen next? We are expecting. What wonderful things from this man. I think it's fair to say that as you heard chapter 14 read a few moments ago.

As you read it through. The events are a little bit of a surprise. Given all of Samson's great promise. We don't expect stories about the killing of a liar.

[ 3 : 24 ] And we don't expect an account of the greatest wedding disaster there's ever been. It's tempting to think as you read through this chapter that Samson falls early. He simply does not live up to his potential.

Like those child stars who burn out by their early twenties. Actually he comes across pretty unpleasantly in this chapter doesn't he? He's a brute. He's a womaniser.

Rather than a saviour and a protector. Yet there is more going on than initially meets the eye in this chapter. There are three scenes. I'm sure you noticed that in this chapter.

You've got Samson's discussion with his parents at the start of the chapter. About this girl he fancies. You've got a scene with the lion on the way to go and get her. And then you get the scene at the wedding party.

At the end of the chapter. But the interesting thing is that in each of these scenes. We are told something about what God is doing. The Lord is involved.

[ 4 : 23 ] The Lord is active in Judges 14. Even though it might appear like he's nowhere to be seen. So that's what we need to look out for as we go through this chapter.

What is the Lord doing? Because the Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. And seeing what he is doing in this chapter. For that's where the challenge and the encouragement will be for us.

Here in Ealing. This morning. Well firstly in verses 1 to 4. I think we see the Lord's purpose. Hidden amongst Samson's desires.

The Lord's purpose. Hidden amongst Samson's desires. Now the chapter begins very ominously doesn't it? Samson's set apart for the Lord.

And part of what that means for an Israelite. Let alone someone who's taken a Nazarite vow. Is that you should only marry other Israelites. Now that's not a racial thing.

[ 5 : 18 ] That is a religious thing. Actually you are to only marry people who worship the Lord. The problem with the Philistines wasn't so much where they came from geographically.

But it was who they worshipped. They worshipped their god Dagon. They were totally opposed to the Lord. So to marry someone whose god was another god. Well there was something very wrong there.

But what do we see Samson doing at the start of this chapter? Well we see Samson don't we? Heading to Timnah. On Judah's northern border. An area completely controlled by the Philistines. And a Philistine girl catches his eye. It's interesting isn't it? In these first four verses. We get a glimpse into the kind of man. That Samson is growing to be.

And it's not good. He's set apart to be a saviour. But he is motivated. By what he sees. There's no hint even is there?

[ 6 : 15 ] That he even spoke to this girl. He is just attracted to her. He's driven by his own desires. He doesn't seem to care about his vows. You see the end of verse 3.

Samson says. Get her for me. She is right in my eyes. That should set off alarm bells. In our minds. If we know the end of the story of Judges. Where do God's people end up?

Well they end up being people. Who do things that are right in their own eyes. Not in God's sight. And actually that's the kind of man that Samson is. He's quite demanding as well isn't he?

Verse 2. He says to his parents. I saw her. You now go out and get her for me. His parents are more godly than he is. They try and talk him out of it.

They know the problems. The issues with his demands. Philistine is not part of God's people. They don't have the sign of the covenant on them. That's why they mention circumcision. But Samson here is just totally driven by his own desires.

[ 7 : 15 ] And not even respect for his parents will stop him. He doesn't seem to even have that. Now you see if that's all the information we had. We would be saddened. And we would be puzzled.

But in verse 4. We are led into something that I think even Samson. And definitely even his parents didn't know. Just look at verse 4. His father and mother did not know that it was from the Lord.

That he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel. Yes Samson is driven by his desires.

He is disregarding everything about his identity. And about his relationship to the Lord. But look what else is going on. The Lord cares about his people.

The Lord is setting into motion a series of events. Through which Samson will take on the Philistines. Even here from this. What we might say is a completely disastrous start for Samson.

[ 8 : 17 ] The Lord is beginning to fulfil his plan for Samson's life. Pretty much despite Samson. The Lord's purpose is here. Hidden amongst Samson's desires.

I don't know if you've ever seen those posters. They were quite popular a few years ago. But I think you can probably still get hold of them. They are posters which are kind of photos.

A kind of big photo. But actually when you look at it. They are made up of lots of individual little photos. I saw a poster a while ago. I think that the big picture was of Yoda.

From Star Wars. When you saw it. It was a massive great poster. And it's of Yoda in one of his poses from the films. But when you got up close. You saw that actually. That photo. Was made up of little squares.

And in each of the squares. Was actually a different photo. From a scene from Star Wars. It was incredibly clever. But the way it had been put together. Presumably by computers.

[ 9 : 17 ] They put together different photos. In such a way. That it made up. A completely different photo. It's quite impressive. I'm sure if you've seen it. You know what I'm talking about.

If you haven't seen it. You haven't got a clue. But that's kind of what you see. A big picture. Made up of lots of little pictures. And that's a little bit like. What you have with the Lord's purpose.

In this chapter. Both. Well in this chapter. In the whole of the Bible. Actually in the whole of life.

What have you got here? You've got an individual scene. Which seems so self-contained.

A mixture of motivations. And actions. The Lord appears to be nowhere to be seen. But yet actually. When you step back. And as the narrator. Tells us.

What's going on in verse 4. We see what the Lord is doing. Fulfilling. His purposes. Unbeknownst to us. You can't see them up close. But you can when you step back.

[ 10 : 15 ] Now that might seem a little bit negative. When you first think about that. It can sound a little bit like. The Lord is a kind of scheming divine being.

Moving figures around on a chessboard. Without those figures really knowing. They are in the hands of the Lord. Just notice again. What the Lord is doing. In this scene.

He is acting for the good of his people. Even though his people are not acting. For their own good.

Verse 4 sounds negative. He is seeking an opportunity against the Philistines.

But it is wonderful. It is rescue here. It is a loving thing the Lord is doing. He is getting his saviour into position. So his enemies can be defeated.

That is the Lord's great purpose. Behind the whole of history. The Lord is at work. But exalting his saviour. Bringing him glory for the good of his people.

[ 11 : 12 ] Even despite the sin and the foolishness of people. It is good news this morning. That the Lord is sovereign. It is good news this morning.

That the Lord is in control. And has a purpose. And has not somehow. Got his hands tied behind his back. Because of the failure.

Of people. So that is the first scene. The Lord's purpose. Hidden amongst Samson's desires. But then we get the second scene. In verses 5 to 9. And we see the Lord's protection.

Hidden amongst Samson's disobedience. The Lord's protection. Hidden. Amongst. Samson's disobedience. So he moves on doesn't it. From verse 5.

Samson has got his way. Shows the weakness of his parents. Who are responsible. For making sure. He keeps his Nazarite vows. And they all go on a family journey.

[ 12 : 07 ] Don't they. Back to Timna. And then somehow. They get separated. In a vineyard. And Samson finds himself. Face to face. With a young lion. But as Alec Mottier says.

As he is writing on this chapter. It is the lion. Who has made the greater error. Of judgment here. Samson. Tears the lion apart. As if it were a young goat. They then carry on.

And get to Timna. Samson meets. And finally talks to this woman. And his passion for her. Is still there. And a while later. They return. For Samson. To marry her. And it's here that things get even more strange.

Don't they. The carcass of the lion. Is still there. But rather than it being full. Of the kind of animals. That usually feed on a dead body. It is full of bees. And it's full of honey.

And Samson again. Can't resist. It looks good to his eyes. So he scrapes out the honey. And he eats it. And he gives it to his parents. Without telling them what's gone on.

[ 13 : 06 ] Now it is a strange little incident. Isn't it? You can look at it and think. What is going on here? I think like the opening verses of this chapter. It reveals more of the kind of man.

That Samson is growing up to be. As a Nazarite. He isn't to touch a dead body. Now. I think. People seem to differ. As to whether.

That just relates to human bodies. Or whether here. In touching a lion. Somehow Samson is disregarding his Nazarite. Now certainly. He seems to be opposed to. To Israelite food laws.

He just doesn't seem to care. What he is doing. He is just acting on what looks good. To his eyes. Even worse. He kind of involves it. His parents. He doesn't tell his parents.

Where this honey has come from. Makes them unclean too. Samson here. Is just a man. Who just acts on his desires. And doesn't care. And is quite happy.

[ 14 : 02 ] To disobey the Lord. And his words. But again. That's not the main point. Of the incident actually. When you look down. At these verses. Look down at verse 6. Why can Samson kill this lion?

Well it's because. The spirit of the Lord. Rushed upon him. You don't need me to tell you. That it's not normal. For a man. To be able to kill a lion. With his bare hands. But what was this lion. Going to do? This lion. Was going to kill. Israel's saviour. So what does God do? The Lord protects him. And gives him the strength. To protect himself.

This lion. Was going to snuff out. The only hope. God's people had. At this point. To stand. Against their enemies. Who are coming against him. But the Lord here.

Protects him. There is hope for God's people. There is hope for Samson here. Because the Lord has not left them. The Lord will protect his saviour. Until he has done.

[ 15 : 01 ] What the Lord. Has called him to do. That is good news. And that is the way God always works. Throughout the Bible. You have got the Lord's. Plans and promises.

For a saviour to come in. To save and rescue God's people. And throughout the Bible. You see. Don't you. Satan. In many different ways. Trying to come in. And snuff out.

That lion. Snuff out that saviour. You see it through the Old Testament. Satan tries to destroy God's people. He tries to destroy. Israel.

He tries to destroy that lion. Which is leading. To the Lord Jesus Christ. But it cannot ever. Be fully. Be snuffed out. Then you read the Gospels. Don't you. And Jesus.

You see the wonderful protection. Of. Of. Of. Of his father. Towards him. As he lives. And this life. Up until that point. Where he is going to die.

[ 15 : 55 ] And he is going to save. And going to rescue. Well Jesus is able to just walk away. And deal with those. Those threats. That come up against him. The Lord. Protects his saviour.

And more than that. We can know this morning. That the Lord protects. His people. The Lord doesn't let. His people. Die out. The Lord. Fulfils his purposes.

And. And gives great. Protection. To those through whom. He is going to protect. His purposes.

There's great comfort. For the church. There's great comfort. For the church. Throughout all ages.

There's great comfort. For us as a church. This morning. The Lord will not let. The cause of his saviour. Be snuffed out. In the late 1960s.

There's an animator. Called Mark Newland. And he created. A two minute cartoon. Which is apparently seen. A bit. As a bit of a classic. Of animation. It's cool. It is called. Bambi. Meets Godzilla.

[ 16 : 54 ] It's only two minutes. You can see it on YouTube. It opens with a. With beautiful. Classical music. And a scene. Of Bambi. Serenely grazing. In a field. And the credits.

Kind of roll. For about. Forty seconds. And the credits finish. And Bambi. Looks up. And he sees. Godzilla's foot. Coming down on him. And he's crushed.

And then the closing credits. Scroll over the image. Of Godzilla's foot. Now sometimes. I think. As God's people. We can feel like that. Perhaps. As the church.

We can feel like. We are so small. In this world. We can feel so pathetic. Sometimes. As individual Christians. We can feel a little bit like that.

Under attack. By. By temptation. And sin. We can feel that. That we're just Bambi. Surrounded by. The kind of Godzilla's. Of the world. And yet.

[ 17 : 50 ] The same spirit. Who protected Samson. Is working within us. And is working within the church. His spirit. Is far more powerful. Than any enemy. I think that's the point. Of verse 6. Of Judges 14.

The spirit is far more powerful. Even than the enemy of death. Jesus Christ. Was crucified. Wasn't he? He was laid in the tomb. But he was risen from the dead. And that's perhaps something. Of the symbolism. Behind the other miracle. In this scene. Honey coming from a dead animal. It just isn't usual. It is a miracle. I think we've got to see that. But what does it show? What is the point. Of this honey.

Coming out of this dead animal. Even if. Samson perhaps. Wasn't supposed to eat it. But it's a picture. Isn't it? Of life. Coming out of something. Dead. In the midst of decay.

There is life. And hope. And perhaps it's just pointing out. That in the midst of the decay. Of Israel. At the time of the judges. There is still life.

[ 18 : 49 ] Because the spirit of the Lord. Is still at work. That's the second scene. We've seen the Lord's purpose. Hidden amongst Samson's desires. We've seen the Lord's protection. Hidden amongst Samson's disobedience.

And now finally notice. The Lord's victory. Hidden. Amongst Samson's weakness. The Lord's victory. Hidden. Amongst Samson's weakness. In verses 10 to 20.

The second half of the chapter. The action moves on. To the party given. For Samson's marriage. To the Philistine woman. It's described as a feast. In verse 10. Actually that. That word more kind of.

Points towards a kind of. Stag party. Really a kind of. We're expected to think of. Of not a kind of. Nice sit down meal. Of a wedding breakfast. But think of more like. A week long drunken celebration.

Again. Showing Samson's total disregard. For his Nazarite vows. And it turns doesn't it. Into a confrontation. With the Philistines. Right from the start.

[ 19 : 49 ] There is conflict. Between Samson. And the Philistines. Those companions. That come in. In verse 11. To Samson. Are unlikely. To be Samson's best mates.

They are more likely. To be Philistine heavies. Who are sent into the party. Just in case. Samson tries anything. The Philistines. Are very wary. Of Samson.

Even though. He is married. And one of them. And Samson provokes him. Doesn't he. He deliberately sets up. A middle. To try and. To try and provoke.

A confrontation. He's got this competition. Doesn't he. If the Philistines. Can work out. What Samson is on about. Well then they win. If not. Then he wins.

Now the terms. Appears to be favourable. Towards the Philistines. The Philistines win. All they need to do. Is give. Give Samson. A pair of clothes. Each. If Samson wins. He needs to give.

[ 20 : 42 ] Give a. A pair of clothes. To each of the. Each of the. The guys. Who are there. But actually. There is no way. That these Philistines. Are going to work out. This riddle. Out of the eater.

Came something to eat. Out of the strong. Came something sweet. It is utter gobbledygook. Isn't it? Unless you were there. Unless you knew. Unless you saw. This incredible miracle. That Samson saw.

With the lion. And with the honey. Now as the scene. Progresses. Actually. Samson. Doesn't appear.

To be very strong. Does he? We don't have. A picture of Samson. At this wedding feast. As a man of strength. And obedience. But actually. We get a picture. Of his incredible weakness. The fact. As I said. Is it. That he's at his party. At all. Doesn't reflect well. On his attitude. To his Nazanite vows. And then just see. What happens. As the riddle. Progresses. Well.

[ 21 : 38 ] Samson's winning. Of course. There's no way. Anyone can work out. What he's been going on about. But actually. The Philistines. End up winning. And notice. How they get.

The information. To win. They come alongside. His wife. To try and get. The information. They need. Out of him. Don't they? They say.

Verse 15. Entice your husband. To tell us. What the riddle is. And Samson's wife. Comes to him. And weeps. And keeps going. Until Samson. Actually tells her.

And then she brings that. The answer. Back. To the Philistines. Now Samson. Comes across incredibly badly. Doesn't he? He doesn't treat his wife. Very well.

His attitude. Initially. Is. Is. Is. First. Kind of. In these verses. Well I haven't told my parents. Why should I tell you? But he does break.

[ 22 : 31 ] Doesn't he? And that's really important. To see. It's really important. To notice the weakness of Samson here. With. His. Philistine wife. That's really important.

Because if you know the story of Samson. You know. What is coming. We know this great tragedy. That is awaiting Samson at the end of his life. With Delilah. But we see that that great tragedy.

At the end of his life. Well it's kind of foreshadowed here. Isn't it? In some ways. It's a dry run. From what is to happen. With. Delilah. It is here. Towards the start of his life.

That we see the seeds of Samson's weakness. Which will. Be fully exposed. At the end. Of his life. It is a serious weakness. That Samson has here.

For. Philistine women. And it is going to lead to his death. Now Samson is furious. Isn't he? About Philistines winning the riddle. He is deeply unpleasant.

[ 23 : 30 ] About his wife. In verse 18. He calls her a cow. And then he storms out. Doesn't he? And he goes to a Philistine town. To get the items of clothing. He owes them. As a prize.

But notice how he gets those clothes. He gets it by killing. 30 Philistines. He literally gives. These. These men at the party. The shirts. Off the backs. Of dead men.

There's no getting around. This is an incredibly unpleasant scene. Samson is. Betrayed as weak. He is. Sexist. And misogynistic.

He reveals. Character flaws. Which we know. Are going to come back. To haunt him. But what we need. To see this morning. Is that. Even here. The Lord is at work.

Remember verse 4. All of these events occur. Because the Lord is seeking. An opportunity. Against the Philistines. And we see that clearly. In verse 19. Don't we? At the point.

[ 24 : 29 ] Where we expect. The Lord to just wash his hands. Samson. Verse 19. The spirit of the Lord. Rushed upon him. And he went down to Ascalon. And struck down. 30 men.

Even here. The Lord is at work. Provoking and defeating. Israel's enemies. He's even using. Weak sinful Samson. To do it. There was no one else.

There was no one else. In Israel. Who wanted to take on the Philistines. For them. And they felt they had peace. In their time. Yet the Lord knows. The Philistines need to be provoked. And they need to be conquered.

And they need to do that. Because the honour and the glory. Of the Lord is at stake. It had got to a stage in Israel. When any fight against the Philistines. Was going to be messy. And it was going to be costly. They'd missed their opportunity.

To deal with them cleanly. When they entered the promised land. The Lord here. I think if you like. Is teaching us people. A very similar thing. To what Winston Churchill.

[ 25 : 27 ] Tried to teach the British Prime Minister. In 1939. Just before the Second World War. He stood up in Parliament. And said this. If you will not fight for the right. When you can easily win.

Without bloodshed. If you will not fight. When your victory will be sure. And not too costly. You may come to the moment. When you will have to fight. With all the odds against you.

And only a precarious chance. To survive. There may even be a worse case. You may have to fight. When there is no hope of victory. Because it is better to perish. Than live as slaves.

And we need to see the big picture. Of what is going on here. It might seem unpleasant. But actually. This is ultimately about. The freedom of God's people. And it is about the glory. And the honour.

Of the name of the Lord. And the fight against sin. And that fight continues. In our own life. Not in violence. Against human beings. But against temptation.

[ 26 : 26 ] And the devil. And sin. All of which have been defeated. By Christ. But that fight continues. In our own lives. Most of all. In our own hearts. If perhaps we struggle.

With the violence. Of these Old Testament stories. I just want to ask. Whether we are really. Taking seriously. The honour of God. Are we fighting against sin. In our own life. Are we taking. To struggle. For the honour of the Lord. Seriously. In our life. Do we see how important. The glory of God is. Let's drawing all this together.

As we close. What do we see in Judges 14. What we see here. Very clearly. Don't we. That it is the Lord. Who is the saviour. Of his people. Yes. He uses Samson here. That Samson is being. Increasingly portrayed. As a weak. And disobedient figure. The Lord. Is at work. He is the one. Who puts all of these events. Together. To drive. These incidents. Forward.

[ 27 : 23 ] This superhuman. Strength. And courage. That Samson has. Well it hasn't come. Because Samson works out. No it has come. Because the spirit. Of the Lord. Comes on him.

That is the same spirit. Of the Lord. Who is at work. In you. If you know. Christ. It is the same spirit. Who is at work. In his church. To give us confidence. As we see Samson.

Destroy a lion. Can we say no. To temptation. Can we put to death. Sin in our life. Can we take the gospel. To others. Can we have.

Can we pray. With confidence. That people will become. Christians. Well we can't do any of those. Things by ourselves. Just as Samson. Couldn't do any of this. By himself. Earth. But we can know. Can't we. That the one who works in us. Is greater. Than the one who is in the world. But then also. Just as we close. We need to notice. That the Lord works. In an incredibly messy way.

[ 28 : 22 ] This chapter is full of sin. But God is not out of control. He's fulfilling his purposes. Using sinful people. And sinful events. That's how unsettles us this morning.

Actually it shouldn't. It should comfort us. God is never responsible for sin. Even though he is sovereign. Even over sin. And why do we know that for certain.

Well remember the cross. That's why I read. Acts chapter 4. Earlier in the service. The greatest fulfillment. Of God's plan. Took place. Through some of the greatest wickedness.

That the world has ever seen. And I don't know about you. But that is strangely comforting. For me this morning. I'm a sinner. And I'm pretty sure. You're a sinner as well. Does that mean. The Lord won't. Or can't use us. No it doesn't. The Lord does. The Lord will. It doesn't excuse sin. But it also means.

[ 29 : 20 ] That we shouldn't despair either. Because the Lord will fulfill. His purposes. Just bow our heads. And pray before we sing.